*History of my life to the year 1797.**

Nequicquam sapit qui sibi non sapit. Cic. ad Treb.

("He knows nothing who does not draw profit from what he knows.")[1]

* Casanova was prevented by death from fulfilling this promise. His memoirs end with the summer of 1774.

PREFACE

I BEGIN by declaring to my reader that, by everything good or bad that I have done throughout my life, I am sure that I have earned merit or incurred guilt, and that hence I must consider myself a free agent. The doctrine of the Stoics,[2] and of any other sect, on the power of Destiny is a figment of the imagination which smacks of atheism. I am not only a monotheist but a Christian whose faith is strengthened by philosophy, which has never injured anything.

I believe in the existence of an immaterial God, creator and lord of all forms; and what proves to me that I have never doubted it is that I have always counted upon his providence, turning to him through prayer in all my tribulations and always finding my prayer granted. Despair kills; prayer dissipates it; and after praying man trusts and acts. What means the Being of Beings employs to avert the evils which hang over those who implore his aid is a question above the power of

human intelligence, which, even as it contemplates the incomprehensibility of Divine Providence, cannot but adore it. Our ignorance becomes our only resource; and the truly happy are they who cherish it. So we must pray to God and believe that we have obtained grace even when appearances tell us that we have not. As for the bodily position we should assume when we address our requests to the Creator, a line of Petrarch's[3] instructs us:

Con le ginocchia della mente inchine.

("With the knees of the mind bent.")[4]

Man is a free agent; but he is not free if he does not believe it, for the more power he attributes to Destiny, the more he deprives himself of the power which God granted him when he gave him *reason.*

Reason is a particle of the Creator's divinity. If we use it to make ourselves humble and just, we cannot but please him who gave it to us. God does not cease to be God except for those who consider his nonexistence possible. They cannot suffer a greater punishment.

Though man is free, he must not believe that he is free to do whatever he pleases. He becomes a slave as soon as he decides to act when he is moved by some passion. *Nisi paret imperat* ("Unless it obeys, it commands").[5] He who has the strength to defer acting until he is calm again is the wise man. Such a being is rare.

The reader who likes to think will see in these memoirs that, since I never aimed at a set goal, the only system I followed, if system it may be called, was to let myself go wherever the wind which was blowing drove me. What vicissitudes in this independence from method and system! My ill fortune no less than my good proved to me that both in this physical world and in the moral world good comes from evil as evil comes from good. My errors will show thoughtful readers these opposite roads or will teach them the great art of straddling the ditch. The one thing necessary is courage, for strength without con-

fidence is useless. I have often seen good fortune fall in my lap as the result of some incautious step which should have cast me into the abyss; and, though I blamed myself, I thanked God. On the other hand, I have also seen an overwhelming misfortune follow upon a course of conduct duly weighed by prudence; I was humiliated; but, sure that I had been right, I soon consoled myself.

Despite an excellent moral foundation, the inevitable fruit of the divine principles which were rooted in my heart, I was all my life the victim of my senses; I have delighted in going astray and I have constantly lived in error, with no other consolation than that of knowing I had erred. For this reason I hope, dear reader, that, far from finding my history mere impudent boasting, you will find that it has the tone suited to a general confession, though in the style of my narratives you will find neither a show of repentance nor the constraint of one who blushes to confess his escapades. My follies are the follies of youth. You will see that I laugh at them, and if you are kind you will laugh at them with me.

You will laugh when you discover that I often had no scruples about deceiving nitwits and scoundrels and fools when I found it necessary. As for women, this sort of reciprocal deceit cancels itself out, for when love enters in, both parties are usually dupes. But fools are a very different matter. I always congratulate myself when I remember catching them in my snares, for they are insolent and presumptuous to the point of challenging intelligence. We avenge intelligence when we deceive a fool, and the victory is worth the effort, for a fool is encased in armor and we do not know where to attack him. In short, deceiving a fool is an exploit worthy of an intelligent man. What has infused my very blood with an unconquerable hatred of the whole tribe of fools from the day of my birth is that I become a fool myself whenever I am in their company. They are, however, to be distinguished from the class of men whom we term

stupid, for since the stupidity of the latter is due only to their lack of educat n, I rather like them. I have found some of them who were very decent and whose stupidity was almost a kind of wit. They are like eyes which, but for a cataract, would be extremely beautiful.

If you, my dear reader, will consider the nature of this preface, you will find it easy to see my purpose in it. I have written it because I want you to know me before you read me. It is only at coffeehouses and inns that we converse with strangers.

I have written my story, and no one can object to that. But am I wise to give it to a public of which I know nothing but what is to its discredit? No! I know that I am being unwise. But I need something to occupy me, something to make me laugh; so why should I deny myself?

> *Expulit elleboro morbum, bilemque meraco.*
>
> ("He drove out the disease and the bile with pure hellebore.")[6]

An ancient author tells me, in lecture-hall tones: "If thou hast not done things worthy to be written, at least write things worthy to be read."[7] It is a precept as brilliant as a diamond of the first water cut in England,[8] but it does not apply to me, for I am writing neither the biography of a famous man nor a romance. Worthy or unworthy, my life is my subject, my subject is my life. Having lived it without ever thinking that I should take a fancy to write it, it may have an interest which it might not have if I had lived it intending to write it in my old age and, what is more, to publish it.

In this year 1797, at the age of seventy-two, when, though I am still breathing, I can say *vixi* ("I have lived"), I can find no pleasanter pastime than to converse with myself about my own affairs and to provide a most worthy subject for laughter to my well-bred audience, for such is the society which has always shown its friendship for me and which I have always frequented.

To write well, I have but to imagine that my readers will belong to it: *Quaecumque dixi, si placuerint, dictavit auditor* ("If what I have said has been pleasing, it is the reader who will have dictated it").[9] As for the uninitiated whom I cannot prevent from reading me, it will be enough for me to know that it was not for them that I wrote.

Remembering the pleasures I enjoyed, I renew them, and I laugh at the pains which I have endured and which I no longer feel. A member of the universe, I speak to the air and I imagine I am rendering an account of my stewardship as the majordomo does to his master, before vanishing. So far as my future is concerned, as a philosopher I have never thought it worth worrying over since I know nothing about it, and as a Christian, I know that faith must believe without arguing and that the purest faith keeps the deepest silence. I know that I have existed, and since I am sure of that because I have felt, I also know that I shall no longer exist when I have ceased to feel. If by any chance I continue to feel after my death, I shall have no more doubts; but I will give the lie to anyone who comes to tell me that I am dead.

Since my history should begin with the earliest fact which my memory can recall to me, it will begin when I had reached the age of eight years and four months. Before then, if it is true that *vivere cogitare est* ("to live is to think"),[10] I did not live, I vegetated. Since human thought consists only in comparisons drawn in order to examine relationships, it cannot precede the existence of memory. The organ of memory did not develop in my head until eight years and four months after my birth; it was only then that my soul began to be capable of receiving impressions. How an immaterial substance which can *nec tangere nec tangi* ("neither touch nor be touched")[11] can receive impressions no man on earth can explain.

A consoling philosophy maintains, in harmony with

religion, that the dependence of the soul upon the senses and organs is only fortuitous and temporary and that the soul will be free and happy when the death of the body liberates it from their tyranny. This is all very fine but, religion apart, it is not certain. So, since I cannot be perfectly sure that I am immortal until after I have ceased to live, I may be forgiven if I am in no hurry to learn this truth. A knowledge purchased at the price of life is bought too dearly. Meanwhile, I worship God, I refrain from committing any injustice and shun those who are unjust, though I do nothing to harm them. I am content to abstain from doing them good. Snakes are not to be cherished.

I must also say something about my temperament and my character. Here the most indulgent among my readers will not be those who are least endowed with honesty and intelligence.

I have been of all the four temperaments: the phlegmatic in my childhood, the sanguine in my youth, then the bilious, and finally the melancholic, which would seem to be with me to remain. By adapting my diet to my constitution, I have always enjoyed good health, and having once learned that what impairs it is always excess, either in eating or in abstaining, I have never had any physician but myself. But I have found that abstinence is the more dangerous by far. Too much brings on indigestion, *too little* kills. At my present advanced age I find that, despite an excellent stomach, I should eat but once a day, but what makes up to me for this privation is sweet sleep and the ease with which I set down my thoughts on paper without any need to indulge in paradoxes or to weave a tissue of sophisms more apt to deceive me than my readers, for I could never bring myself to give them counterfeit coin if I knew it was counterfeit.

The sanguine temperament made me extremely susceptible to the seduction of any pleasurable sensation, always cheerful, eager to pass from one enjoyment to

another and ingenious in inventing them. From it came my inclination to make new acquaintances as well as my readiness to break them off, though always for some good reason and never from mere fickleness. Defects arising from a temperament cannot be corrected, because our temperament is independent of our powers; but character is another matter. It is constituted by heart and mind and, since temperament has very little influence here, it follows that character depends on upbringing and that it can be altered and reformed.

I leave it to others to decide if my character is good or bad, but such as it is, anyone versed in physiognomy can easily read it in my face. It is only there that a man's character becomes visible, for the physiognomy is its seat. It is worth noting that men who have no physiognomy, and there are a great many such, are equally lacking in what is called a character. Hence the diversity of physiognomies will be equal to the diversity of characters.

Having observed that I have all my life acted more from the force of feeling than from my reflections, I have concluded that my conduct has depended more on my character than on my mind, after a long struggle between them in which I have alternately found myself with too little intelligence for my character and too little character for my intelligence. But enough of this, for it is a matter on which *si brevis esse volo obscurus fio* ("when I try to be brief, I become obscure").[12] I believe that, without offending against modesty, I can apply to myself these words from my beloved Vergil:

> *Nec sum adeo informis: nuper me in litore vidi*
> *Cum placidum ventis staret mare.*[13]
>
> ("I am not such a monster; lately I saw my reflection
> by the shore when the sea was calm.")

Cultivating whatever gave pleasure to my senses was always the chief business of my life; I have never found

any occupation more important. Feeling that I was born for the sex opposite to mine, I have always loved it and done all that I could to make myself loved by it. I have also been extravagantly fond of good food and irresistibly drawn by anything which could excite curiosity.

I had friends who did me good turns, and I was so fortunate on all such occasions as to have it in my power to show them my gratitude; and I had execrable enemies who persecuted me and whom I did not destroy only because I could not. I would never have forgiven them if I had not forgotten the wrongs they did me. The man who forgets a wrong has not forgiven it, he has simply forgotten it; for forgiveness comes from a heroic sentiment in a noble heart and a magnanimous mind, whereas forgetting comes from weakness of memory or from an easy apathy natural to a pacific soul, and often from a need for peace and quiet; for hatred, in the end, kills the unfortunate man who fosters it.

If anyone calls me a sensualist he will be wrong, for the power of my senses never drew me from my duty when I had one. For the same reason Homer should never have been taxed with drunkenness: *Laudibus arguitur vini vinosus Homerus* ("Homer's praise of wine convicts him of having been given to wine").[14]

I have always liked highly seasoned dishes: macaroni prepared by a good Neapolitan cook, *olla podrida,*[15] good sticky salt cod from Newfoundland, high game on the very edge, and cheeses whose perfection is reached when the little creatures which inhabit them become visible. As for women, I have always found that the one I was in love with smelled good, and the more copious her sweat the sweeter I found it.

What a depraved taste! How disgraceful to admit it and not blush for it! This sort of criticism makes me laugh. It is precisely by virtue of my coarse tastes, I have the temerity to believe, that I am happier than

other men, since I am convinced that my tastes make me capable of more pleasure. Happy they who know how to obtain pleasure without harming anyone; they are madmen who imagine that the Great Being can enjoy the griefs, the sufferings, the abstinences which they offer him in sacrifice, and that he loves none but fanatics who inflict them on themselves. God can demand of his creatures only that they practice the virtues whose seed he has sown in their souls, and he has given us nothing which is not meant to make us happy: self-esteem, desire for praise, emulation, vigor, courage, and a power which no tyranny can take from us: the power to kill ourselves if, after calculating, be it rightly or wrongly, we are unfortunate enough to find it our best recourse. It is the strongest proof of that moral freedom in us which sophism has so often argued against. Yet nature rightly holds it in abhorrence; and all religions cannot but forbid it.

A would-be freethinker told me one day that I could not call myself a philosopher and at the same time accept revelation.

If we do not doubt it in the physical world, why should we not accept it in religion? It is only a question of the form which it takes. Spirit speaks to spirit, not to the ears. The principles of all that we know must have been revealed to those who handed them down to us by the great and supreme principle which contains all principles. The bee making its hive, the swallow building its nest, the ant digging its hole, the spider weaving its web would never have done anything without a previous eternal revelation. We must either believe that this is so, or admit that matter thinks. Why not, Locke[16] would say, if God so willed? But we dare not do such honor to matter. So let us hold to revelation.

The great philosopher who, after studying nature, thought he could cry "Victory!" when he concluded that nature was God, died too soon. If he had lived a few more years he would have gone much further and his journey

would not have been a long one. Finding himself in his author, he could no longer have denied him: *in eo movemur, et sumus* ("in him we move and have our being").[17] He would have found him inconceivable; and it would not have troubled him. Could God, the great principle of principles, and who never had a principle—could even he conceive himself if to conceive himself he had to know his own principle? O happy ignorance! Spinoza, the virtuous Spinoza, died without having attained to it. He would have died a wise man, with the right to expect the reward of his virtues, if he had supposed that his soul was immortal.

It is not true that an expectation of reward is unworthy of true virtue and impairs its purity, for, on the contrary, it helps to sustain virtue, since man is too weak to wish to be virtuous only for his own satisfaction. I believe that Amphiaraus,[18] who *vir bonus esse quam videri malebat* ("chose to be good rather than to seem good"),[19] is sheer fable. In short, I believe that there is not an honest man in the world without some sort of expectation. And now I will set forth mine.

I expect the friendship, the esteem, and the gratitude of my readers. Their gratitude, if reading my memoirs will have given them instruction and pleasure. Their esteem if, doing me justice, they will have found that I have more virtues than faults; and their friendship as soon as they come to find me deserving of it by the frankness and good faith with which I submit myself to their judgment without in any way disguising what I am.

They will find that I have always loved truth so passionately that I have often resorted to lying as a way of first introducing it into minds which were ignorant of its charms. They will not condemn me when they see me emptying my friends' purses to satisfy my whims. They were possessed by chimerical projects, and by making them hope for their success I at the same time hoped to cure them of their folly by opening their eyes. I deceived

them to make them wise; and I did not consider myself guilty, because what I did was not prompted by avarice. I was simply paying for my pleasures with money allotted to acquiring possessions which nature makes it impossible to obtain. I should consider myself guilty if I were a rich man today. I have nothing; whatever I had, I have squandered; and this consoles and justifies me. It was money which was to be spent on follies; I merely changed its application by making it pay for mine.

If I am deceived in my hope of pleasing, I admit that I should be sorry, but not sorry enough to make me repent of having written, for nothing can change the fact that I have found it a pastime. The cruelty of boredom! It can only be because they had forgotten it that the inventors of the pains of hell did not include it among them.

Yet I will confess that I cannot rid myself of the fear of being hissed. It is too natural a fear for me to dare boast that I am above it; and I am far from consoling myself by hoping that when my memoirs are published I shall be no more. It horrifies me even to imagine myself contracting the slightest obligation to death, which I loathe. Happy or unhappy, life is the only treasure which man possesses, and they who do not love it do not deserve it. Honor is set above it only because dishonor blasts it. If a man faced with this choice kills himself, philosophy can have nothing to say. O death! cruel law of nature which reason cannot but condemn, for it operates only to destroy reason. Cicero[20] says that it frees us from our ills. That great philosopher records the expenditure, but does not include the receipts in his accounting. I do not remember if, when he wrote his Tusculans, his Tulliola was dead. Death is a monster which drives an attentive spectator from the great theater before the play in which he is infinitely interested is over. This alone is reason enough to hate it.

In these memoirs the reader will not find all my ad-

ventures. I have left out those which would have offended the people who played a part in them, for they would cut a sorry figure in them. Even so, there are those who will sometimes think me only too indiscreet; I am sorry for it. If I become wise before I die, and if I have time, I will burn my whole manuscript. At the moment I have not the strength of mind for that.

Those who think that I lay on too much color when I describe certain amorous adventures in detail will be wrong, unless, that is, they consider me a bad painter altogether. I beg them to forgive me if, in my old age, my soul is reduced to feeling no joys but those of memory. Virtue will skip all the pictures which may affright it; and I am glad to give it this warning in my preface. So much the worse for those who do not read it. The preface stands to the work as the bill does to the play. It is to be read. I have not written these memoirs for those young people who can only save themselves from falling by spending their youth in ignorance, but for those whom experience of life has rendered proof against being seduced, whom living in the fire has transformed into salamanders. Since true virtues are only habits, I can say that the truly virtuous are those happy people who practice them without any effort. Such people have no notion of intolerance. It is for them that I have written. I have written in French instead of in Italian because the French language is more widely known than mine. The purists who, finding turns of expression proper to my native country in my style, will criticize me on that score will be right if they are prevented from understanding me. The Greeks relished Theophrastus[21] despite his Eresian expressions, as the Romans did their Livy[22] despite his "Patavinity." If I succeed in interesting, I hope I may benefit by the same indulgence. All Italy relishes Algarotti[23] although his style is full of Gallicisms.

Yet it is worth observing that among all the living languages in the republic of letters,[24] French is the only one which its presiding judges[25] have sentenced not to enrich itself at the expense of the other languages, whereas these, though all richer than French, pillaged it not only of its words but also of its mannerisms as soon as they realized that these little thefts beautified them. Yet those who subjected it to this law at the same time admitted its poverty. They said that since it had reached the point of possessing all the beauties of which it was capable, the slightest foreign admixture would disfigure it. This judgment may have been handed down by prejudice. In Lully's[26] day the whole nation thought the same of its music, until Rameau[27] came to teach it better. Today, under the Republican government, eloquent orators and learned writers have already convinced all Europe that they will raise French to a pitch of beauty and power which the world has not yet seen in any other language. In the short space of five years it has already acquired some hundred words which are amazing either for their sweetness or their majesty or their noble harmony. Is it possible, for example, to invent anything more beautiful in the realm of language than *ambulance, Franciade,*[28] *monarchien, sansculottisme*? Long live the Republic! A body without a head cannot possibly commit follies.

The motto which I have flaunted justifies my digressions and the commentaries in which I indulge, perhaps too often, on my exploits of various kinds: *nequicquam sapit qui sibi non sapit.*[29] For the same reason I always felt a need to hear myself praised in good company:

> *Excitat auditor studium, laudataque virtus*
> *crescit, et immensum gloria calcar habet.*
>
> ("Having an audience makes one try harder, virtue grows by praise, and fame is a powerful spur.")[30]

I should have liked to display the proud axiom *Nemo*

leditur nisi a seipso ("No one suffers except by his own doing"),[31] had I not feared to offend the vast number of those who, whenever anything goes wrong for them, cry "It is not my fault." It is best to leave them this small consolation, for without it they would hate themselves; and self-hatred is soon followed by the thought of suicide.

For my part, since I have always admitted that I was the chief cause of all the misfortunes which have befallen me, I have rejoiced in my ability to be my own pupil, and in my duty to love my teacher.

History of
Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, Venetian,
written by himself at
Dux in Bohemia

Nequicquam sapit qui sibi non sapit. Cic. ad Treb.

(''He knows nothing who does not draw profit from what he knows.'')[1]